

**Abstract of Paper
of
“Pyongyang Between Seoul and Washington”**

**By Dr. C. Kenneth Quinones
Former North Korea Affairs Director
U.S. Department of State**

**For
Hiroshima University
November 2005**

The future of the U.S.-Republic of Korea alliance hinges on the ability of these allies to adjust promptly and realistically to changing circumstances in Northeast Asia. The partnership must strike a new balance between Washington’s preoccupation with global security concerns and Seoul’s pursuit of reconciliation with North Korea. Otherwise, the half century old alliance could retreat into history.

Today, the alliance is under strain. But this is not a new phenomenon. If anything, strain has been a prominent and continuing characteristic not just in the US-ROK alliance, but all similar alliances forged during the Cold War. Even older North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) survived France’s preference for its own nuclear capability, Western European opposition to the US placement of ballistic missiles in Western Europe, plus numerous other testy issues. NATO survived not just these tests, but the even the Soviet Union’s collapse and the Cold War’s end, at least in Europe.

Alas, the Cold War persists on the Korean Peninsula. The US-ROK alliance is a consequence of that war. When forged, its primary purpose was to deter another North Korean invasion of South Korea. Since the alliance’s conception, each government’s role and contribution to the alliance has and remains a source of tension. Nevertheless, the partners shared virtually the identical goals of deterrence, preservation of the Korean War Armistice and sustaining South Korea as the sole legitimate government on the Korean Peninsula.

Change in Northeast Asia, however, has outpaced both Washington and Seoul’s political willingness to recast their alliance. Both still share the common goal of discouraging North Korea aggression on the Korean Peninsula. Until 1992, Seoul set the pace and direction for policy toward North Korea while remaining heavily dependent on Washington regarding military strategy. At the same time, Washington played the supporting role regarding diplomacy toward North Korea while sustaining the lead in military strategy.

But since 1992, the two capitals’ priorities have diverged. From the start of the Clinton Administration in 1993, Washington seized leadership of policy toward North Korea. It did so citing concerns about North Korea’s role in the global proliferation of ballistic missiles and development of a nuclear weapons’ capability. Then President Kim Young-

sam's vacillated between pushing the US to negotiate with North Korea and refusing to sanction the outcome of these negotiations. The alliances sought to rationalize the consequent tension between them by accusing North Korea of trying to "drive a wedge" between Seoul and Washington. If anything, Pyongyang undoubtedly sought to manipulate this "wedge" to its advantage. On the other hand, the wedge was a consequence of diverging priorities between Washington and Seoul, not a product of some mysterious North Korean capability to pit the United States against South Korea.

Obviously, since 2001 after George Bush became president, the strain in the US-Korea relationship appears to have intensified. The Bush Administration's foreign policy priorities are to preserve the *status quo ante bellum* on the Korean Peninsula. In other words, President Bush's is determined to rid North Korea of all nuclear programs, maintain the Korean War Armistice and impede North Korea's economic modernization. The South Korean administrations of Presidents Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun aim to achieve the opposite. Their priority is national reconciliation and the inducement of North Korea to give up its nuclear weapons capability in exchange for the means to revitalize and modernize its economy.

My paper will explore the causes and consequences of this divergence of goals in the US-ROK relationship and their potential consequences on the Korean Peninsula and North east Asia.